



Brown in 1798 by James Sharples,  
Worcester Art Museum.

## IN THE SHADOWS OF LIBERTY: Charles Brockden Brown and Nascent American Gothic

*"The flattering reception that has been given, by the public, to Arthur Mervyn, has prompted the writer to solicit a continuance of the same favour, and to offer to the world a new performance. America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter. That new springs of action, and new motives to curiosity should operate; that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe, may be readily conceived. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart, that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country, and connected with one of the most common and most wonderful diseases or affections of the human frame.*

*"One merit the writer may at least claim; that of calling forth the passions and engaging the sympathy of the reader, by means hitherto unemployed by preceding authors. Puerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras, are the materials usually employed for this end. The incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness, are far more suitable; and, for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no apology. These, therefore, are, in part, the ingredients of this tale, and these he has been ambitious of depicting in vivid and faithful colours. The success of his efforts must be estimated by the liberal and candid reader."*

~ Preface to *Edgar Huntly* (1801)

*"I saw him [in Philadelphia], a little time before his death. I had never known him -- never heard of him -- never read any of his works. He was in a deep decline. It was the month of November -- our Indian summer -- when the air is full of smoke. Passing a window one day -- I was caught by the sight of a man -- with a remarkable physiognomy -- writing, at a table, in a dark room. The sun shown directly upon his head. I shall never forget it. The dead leaves were falling then -- It was Charles Brockden Brown."*  
~ painter Thomas Sully, 1809.<sup>1</sup>

Following a glorious founding and elated beginning, it wasn't long before the fledgling United States began feeling the affects of new, strange and disturbing problems that had their origins both domestically and abroad. America's economy had generally been on the rise before and during the revolution, and with increased wealth came rising populations and, in turn, concomitant problems of crime and sickness; with war itself soon resuming on both the frontier and, not long after, in and from Europe as well.

It was during this both confident yet sometimes troubling transition period that there entered on the cultural scene one of the most precocious (for his time) and enigmatic authors the United States ever produced, Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810), from Philadelphia, and whose person and life seems almost as fraught with mystery and puzzles as any of his novels.<sup>2</sup> Doubtless he stands out as a peculiar

<sup>1</sup> Duyckinck *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* (1854-1875.), vol. 1, pp.611-612.

<sup>2</sup> Though typically situated in Pennsylvania, they were written in New York (city) 1798-1801. Brown composed four; of which these are extant: *Wieland* (1798), *Ormond* (1799), *Arthur Mervyn* (in two parts, 1799 and 1800), *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* (1799-1800), *Edgar Huntly* (1801); and also later two sentimental romances *Clara Howard* (1800) and *Jane Talbot* (1801). While it might be pointed out that Philip Freneau's lengthy poem "The House of Night" (1779) should be awarded honors as the first and most decidedly impressive work of American Gothic literature, we can make the distinction of saying that Freneau's is a work of verse; and Brown's *Wieland* the first in prose form. Ironically, Brown, in later years, effectively disavowed and lamented his gothic novels; even though they are now almost the sole basis of his famous reputation.

anomaly in the America of his generation. While it is commonly stated that he influenced the work of Hawthorne and Melville, outside of suggestions or echoes of Brown's style in their writings, I myself have yet to come across an explicit reference by any of these to him.<sup>3</sup> This is by no means to say that none exist, but it will be somewhat remarkable for someone to inform me specifically of such. For Brown's clear and unmistakable influence on Edgar Allan Poe, however, compare the latter's "Pit and the Pendulum" with the cave scenes in *Edgar Huntly*. Meanwhile, early American playwright, painter, and theater historian William Dunlap, and noted historian William Prescott, it is known, *did* write biographies of him.<sup>4</sup> Dunlap is interesting because as well as being a personal associate of Brown's, both he and the latter evinced a pronounced interest in the stage and which greatly impacted their subsequent work. In addition, both were members of the "Friendly Club"<sup>5</sup> of New York; which 1796 belles-lettres confraternity; also included the highly respected minister, "Connecticut Wit," and later Yale College president Timothy Dwight, and Elihu Hubbard Smith, a physician (who specialized in psychology) and colleague of Benjamin Rush, devotee of literature,<sup>6</sup> close friend, and significant influence on Brown. While Brown's father had been a pro-American pacifist Quaker during the Revolution, Dunlap's father had been a loyalist surgeon who served in the British Army -- so that the Friendly Club was distinctive as a gathering of thinkers who originally hailed from diverse ends of the revolutionary political spectrum with a joint concern in literature and social (including moral) reform. About four years later Brown was part of avid Federalist Joseph Dennie's anglophilic Philadelphia literary circle, and in this we encounter something of a paradox. For although Brown had ardently welcomed Enlightenment reformation of mankind, like the Federalists he shrank in frank disgust at French Revolutionary *égalité*.<sup>7</sup>

Possibly the oddest and most overlooked thing about Brown, who first trained to be a lawyer, is that he was, by temperament, an entertainer.<sup>8</sup> Yes, a sociologist, crusader for progress, an astute and eager psychologist, visionary aesthete, and literary artiste of (later) high repute -- but also, as author, a flamboyant showman -- who but for his pathologically introspective nature might have proved a wonder as a playwright.<sup>9</sup> In fact, his mystery and detective novels (and I think it is fair to categorize them as that; though they are scarcely denoted such) have in them scenes to rival German Expressionist cinema of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in originality, and surreal matter and events *visually* arousing in their elements and composition.

Yet in Brown, sensationalism, insane behavior, and eccentric characters are not mere entertainment but devices inextricably connected to his purpose of drawing attention to a variety of moral and psychological conflicts and dilemmas taking place behind the backdrop of public society; crying out to be addressed. Moreover, Brown probably took up literature due in some degree to his initial disillusionment with the power of churches to reform people; so that, as with Freneau and Barlow, writing for the public became a substitute religious calling.<sup>10</sup> And yet what in truth was sour about religion was not religion itself, but its occasional seizure by forces both earthly and unearthly; that are insincere, crooked, and, in some instances, even sinister and malevolent -- phenomena glaringly exhibited to view in Brown's horrific *Wieland*.<sup>11</sup> So that as time went on Brown himself would seemed to have come to realize that the fault lay

<sup>3</sup> Among Brown's European admirers were Shelley and Sir Walter Scott; the latter evincing this by his naming some of his characters in *Guy Mannering, or The Astrologer* (1815) after Brown himself and after Brown's own creation Arthur Mervyn. Cooper, on the other hand, makes not so flattering reference to *Edgar Huntley* in the preface to the very first edition (1821) of *The Spy*.

<sup>4</sup> Worth mentioning also is Brown's interesting obituary found in the 1810 installment of *The American Register* (1811), vol. VII, pp. 169-170, and for which publication Brown had been an editor.

<sup>5</sup> Friendly Clubs were a *type* of gathering for their time, rather than a specific or proper name; formed as a venue in which to discuss matters legal, political, philosophical, and literary; with Brown's group then being one such.

<sup>6</sup> Smith is also sometimes included as one of the Connecticut, or Hartford, Wits, i.e., along with Dwight, Joel Barlow, John Trumbull, David Humphreys, Lemuel Hopkins, and Richard Alsop. In 1793 he published *American Poems, Original and Selected*; the first such anthology of its kind.

<sup>7</sup> It is not inconceivable that Brown's sending President Jefferson a complimentary copy of *Wieland* may have been prompted by an unstated or implied desire to ridicule Jefferson's faith in the common people.

<sup>8</sup> In the positive and best sense of the title.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, however, expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea of himself writing for the stage in a letter to William Dunlap of 28 Nov. 1794; and which can be found in Dunlap's *The Life of Charles Brockden Brown* (1815), vol. 2, pp. 91-93.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, it should be added, came to see himself as an *outcast* Quaker. "Arch-heretic" and human rights zealot Thomas Paine of course, was also brought up in a Quaker family.

<sup>11</sup> Very curiously, the novel's title character (and who murders his children after hearing what he thinks is the voice of "God" commanding such), and according to the fictional narrator's own explanation, is described as a distant relative of the *real life*, and then still living, Wiemar poet Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813). Wieland, as well as exerting a profound influence on Goethe's

not with religion but rather with those who corrupted it. He came to lay the Gothic novel aside; penned instead two of a sentimental type; married, and returned to a more orthodox religious outlook while continuing to write and speak out on public affairs in magazines he edited and occasional political pieces.

The reportorial or journalistic manner of Daniel Defoe, and that punctilioously leaves (almost) no detail unturned or unanalyzed, is quite evident in Brown's work, as is Joseph Addison's matter of fact narrative style.<sup>12</sup> He was further strongly influenced by the sociological and psychological novels of English author William Godwin; yet with Brown's allowing himself free rein to invent and expand on the former. His style also draws heavily on the conventional 18<sup>th</sup> century novel: such as the reliance on the picaresque and episodic; on the use of letters, like in Samuel Richardson and Brown's American predecessor William Hill Brown (1765-1793) in the latter's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789),<sup>13</sup> to tell much of the tale; except that in Brown's case the epistles, of say such as would be used by Richardson's characters, are turned into very lengthy *spoken* narratives. Often in his given novel, Brown (or else his character that speaks) belabors a point, sometimes obsessively; but always in a steady and singularly lucid manner; with the sentences of even Brown's distraught or bewildered prisoners, wanderers, and fugitives being models of crisp succinctness and clarity. He strings together the weirdest and baffling of occurrences while not infrequently, and in effect, then asking the thinking reader to explain how his character(s) got or ended up there where they were; and, moreover, as a means of raising serious questions as to what *actually* motivates human actions. Nor would it be stretching things to liken his narratives to dreams, filled with constantly shifting and changing events; where seldom, if ever, is anything adequately resolved. That he was at times dismaying readers with recounts of inexplicably lurid events and bizarre crimes does not, at least in his earlier years, seemed to have bothered him; so that one sometimes is perplexed or at least left wondering as to the design behind his brand of shock story-telling. True, had he written at a later period in American history than he did, we would not be nearly so surprised by such an approach. But writing for the era in which he lived, such introduction or bringing in of the graphic, grotesque, and diabolical in real life situations, for fiction purposes, is no little peculiar.<sup>14</sup> Some have suspected Brown may have had more humor to him than on the surface appears. Be that as it may, certainly his characters themselves are conspicuously humorless. Rather ludicrously, *Arthur Mervyn*, after all sorts of bitterly drawn out, tragic and medically agonizing ordeals, ends on a note of romance. Was there in this, as averred by some, intended sarcasm aimed at his novel's main character, or rather was he making an appeal to hope amid the ruins?

In that same novel the preponderance of the events that occur in relation to the devastating Yellow Fever plague that struck Philadelphia -- then the nation's capitol<sup>15</sup> -- in 1793, and which took the lives of some 5,000 people, including that of Brown's intellectual mentor Elihu Hubbard Smith. Rather ingeniously, Brown uses the epidemic as a motif that thematically reflects and complements the *moral* maladies pervading the beleaguered city: greed, murder, forgery, acrimonious jealousies and rivalries, intrigues, robbery, prostitution, infant mortality, unpaid debts that imply crime and or bring about imprisonment of someone,<sup>16</sup> and an often cold indifference to other's suffering generally.

As way of introduction for some, what ensues are portions of *Mervyn* directly describing the pestilence. Mervyn has come to the city in order to find Wallace, the fiancée of an acquaintance of his

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poetry (compare for example aspects of the former's fantastic *Oberon* to *Faust* part II); was an eloquent, Voltaire-like critic against religious fraud and fanaticism, particularly in his novel *The History of Agathon* (1766-67), and which Brown was well acquainted with.

<sup>12</sup> Compare, for instance, Addison's short story "Theodosius and Constantia," Spec. 164, Sept. 7, 1711, with the sort of multi-layered plot formula and character presentation Brown uses in his own fiction.

<sup>13</sup> Said by some to be the first American novel, but technically that honor goes to *The Adventures of Alonso* (1775) by Thomas Atwood Gibbes of Warburton, Maryland; though the setting and character of that work is entirely European.

<sup>14</sup> In chapter 30 of *Arthur Mervyn* for example there is a scene where the protagonist matter-of-factly buries a plague victim, sans coffin or shroud, in someone's backyard.

<sup>15</sup> i.e., from 1790 to 1800.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Woodworth (whom some may recollect we wrote an article on not long since), John Pendleton Kennedy, and other contemporaries of Brown were outspoken against imprisonment for debt; viewing it as an unnecessarily cruel and counterproductive measure. It wasn't till 1833 that the US ended Federal imprisonment for insolvent debtors; with other states following up till about 1850 when the practice was finally ended. So oppressive was the law until its revocation that even some of the country's most famous citizens and leaders, such as James Wilson, Robert Morris, and Henry Lee, it will be recalled, served time in jail for falling into arrears.

(Susan Hadwin); whom it is feared has succumbed to the plague. If you are unfamiliar with the novel it is not required to know and understand quite all what is going on or alluded to here. All that is necessary is to permit yourself to accompany Mervyn on what is a typically strange odyssey of one of Brown's typically strange characters in order to experience the startling power of Brown's innovative brand of eerie drama.

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#### *Chapter XV.*

These meditations did not enfeeble my resolution, or slacken my pace. In proportion as I drew near the city, the tokens of its calamitous condition became more apparent. Every farm-house was filled with supernumerary tenants, fugitives from home, and haunting the skirts of the road, eager to detain every passenger with inquiries after news. The passengers were numerous; for the tide of emigration was by no means exhausted. Some were on foot, bearing in their countenances the tokens of their recent terror, and filled with mournful reflections on the forlornness of their state. Few had secured to themselves an asylum; some were without the means of paying for victuals or lodging for the coming night; others, who were not thus destitute, yet knew not whither to apply for entertainment, every house being already overstocked with inhabitants, or barring its inhospitable doors at their approach.

Families of weeping mothers and dismayed children, attended with a few pieces of indispensable furniture, were carried in vehicles of every form. The parent or husband had perished; and the price of some movable, or the pittance handed forth by public charity, had been expended to purchase the means of retiring from this theatre of disasters, though uncertain and hopeless of accommodation in the neighbouring districts.

Between these and the fugitives whom curiosity had led to the road, dialogues frequently took place, to which I was suffered to listen. From every mouth the tale of sorrow was repeated with new aggravations. Pictures of their own distress, or of that of their neighbours, were exhibited in all the hues which imagination can annex to pestilence and poverty.

My preconceptions of the evil now appeared to have fallen short of the truth. The dangers into which I was rushing seemed more numerous and imminent than I had previously imagined. I wavered not in my purpose. A panic crept to my heart, which more vehement exertions were necessary to subdue or control; but I harboured not a momentary doubt that the course which I had taken was prescribed by duty. There was no difficulty or reluctance in proceeding. All for which my efforts were demanded was to walk in this path without tumult or alarm.

Various circumstances had hindered me from setting out upon this journey as early as was proper. My frequent pauses to listen to the narratives of travellers contributed likewise to procrastination. The sun had nearly set before I reached the precincts of the city. I pursued the track which I had formerly taken, and entered High Street after nightfall. Instead of equipages and a throng of passengers, the voice of levity and glee, which I had formerly observed, and which the mildness of the season would, at other times, have produced, I found nothing but a dreary solitude.

The market-place, and each side of this magnificent avenue, were illuminated, as before, by lamps; but between the verge of Schuylkill [River] and the heart of the city I met not more than a dozen figures; and these were ghost-like, wrapped in cloaks, from behind which they cast upon me glances of wonder and suspicion, and, as I approached, changed their course, to avoid touching me. Their clothes were sprinkled with vinegar, and their nostrils defended from contagion by some powerful perfume.

I cast a look upon the houses, which I recollect to have formerly been, at this hour, brilliant with lights, resounding with lively voices, and thronged with busy faces. Now they were closed, above and below; dark, and without tokens of being inhabited. From the upper windows of some, a gleam sometimes fell upon the pavement I was traversing, and showed that their tenants had not fled, but were secluded or disabled.

These tokens were new, and awakened all my panics. Death seemed to hover over this scene, and I dreaded that the floating pestilence had already lighted on my frame. I had scarcely overcome these tremors, when I approached a house the door of which was opened, and before which stood a vehicle, which I presently recognised to be a hearse.

The driver was seated on it. I stood still to mark his visage, and to observe the course which he proposed to take. Presently a coffin, borne by two men, issued from the house. The driver was a negro; but his companions were white. Their features were marked by ferocious indifference to danger or pity. One of them, as he assisted in thrusting the coffin into the cavity provided for it, said, "I'll be damned if I think the poor dog was quite dead. It wasn't the *fever* that ailed him, but the sight of the girl and her mother on the floor. I wonder how they all got into that room. What carried them there?"

The other surlily muttered, "Their legs, to-be-sure."

"But what should they hug together in one room for?"

"To save us trouble, to-be-sure."

"And I thank them with all my heart; but, damn it, it wasn't right to put him in his coffin before the breath was fairly gone. I thought the last look he gave me told me to stay a few minutes."

"Pshaw! He could not live. The sooner dead the better for him; as well as for us. Did you mark how he eyed us when we carried away his wife and daughter? I never cried in my life, since I was knee-high, but curse me if I ever felt in better tune for the business than just then. Hey!" continued he, looking up, and observing me standing a few paces distant, and listening to their discourse; "what's wanted? Anybody dead?"

I stayed not to answer or parley, but hurried forward. My joints trembled, and cold drops stood on my forehead. I was ashamed of my own infirmity; and, by vigorous efforts of my reason, regained some degree of composure. The evening had now advanced, and it behooved me to procure accommodation at some of the inns.

These were easily distinguished by their *signs*, but many were without inhabitants. At length I lighted upon one, the hall of which was open and the windows lifted. After knocking for some time, a young girl appeared, with many marks of distress. In answer to my question, she answered that both her parents were sick, and that they could receive no one. I inquired, in vain, for any other tavern at which strangers might be accommodated. She knew of none such, and left me, on someone's calling to her from above, in the midst of my embarrassment. After a moment's pause, I returned, discomfited and perplexed, to the street.

I proceeded, in a considerable degree, at random. At length I reached a spacious building in Fourth Street, which the signpost showed me to be an inn. I knocked loudly and often at the door. At length a female opened the window of the second story, and, in a tone of peevishness, demanded what I wanted. I told her that I wanted lodging.

"Go hunt for it somewhere else," said she; "you'll find none here." I began to expostulate; but she shut the window with quickness, and left me to my own reflections.

I began now to feel some regret at the journey I had taken. Never, in the depth of caverns or forests, was I equally conscious of loneliness. I was surrounded by the habitations of men; but I was destitute of associate or friend. I had money, but a horse-shelter, or a morsel of food, could not be purchased. I came for the purpose of relieving others, but stood in the utmost need myself. Even in health my condition was helpless and forlorn; but what would become of me should this fatal malady be contracted? To hope that an asylum would be afforded to a sick man, which was denied to one in health, was unreasonable...

I immediately directed my steps towards the habitation of Thetford. Carriages bearing the dead were frequently discovered. A few passengers likewise occurred, whose hasty and perturbed steps denoted their participation in the common distress. The house of which I was in quest quickly appeared. Light from an upper window indicated that it was still inhabited.

I paused a moment to reflect in what manner it became me to proceed. To ascertain the existence and condition of Wallace was the purpose of my journey. He had inhabited this house; and whether he remained in it was now to be known. I felt repugnance to enter, since my safety might, by entering, be unawares and uselessly endangered. Most of the neighbouring houses were apparently deserted. In some there were various tokens of people being within. Might I not inquire, at one of these, respecting the condition of Thetford's family? Yet why should I disturb them by inquiries so impertinent at this unseasonable hour? To knock at Thetford's door, and put my questions to him who should obey the signal, was the obvious method.

I knocked dubiously and lightly. No one came. I knocked again, and more loudly; I likewise drew the bell. I distinctly heard its distant peals. If any were within, my signal could not fail to be noticed. I paused, and listened, but neither voice nor footsteps could be heard. The light, though obscured by window-curtains, which seemed to be drawn close, was still perceptible.

I ruminated on the causes that might hinder my summons from being obeyed. I figured to myself nothing but the helplessness of disease, or the insensibility of death. These images only urged me to persist in endeavouring to obtain admission. Without weighing the consequences of my act, I involuntarily lifted the latch. The door yielded to my hand, and I put my feet within the passage.

Once more I paused. The passage was of considerable extent, and at the end of it I perceived light as from a lamp or candle. This impelled me to go forward, till I reached the foot of a staircase. A candle stood upon the lowest step.

This was a new proof that the house was not deserted. I struck my heel against the floor with some violence; but this, like my former signals, was unnoticed. Having proceeded thus far, it would have been absurd to retire with my purpose uneffected. Taking the candle in my hand, I opened a door that was near. It led into a spacious parlour, furnished with profusion and splendour. I walked to and fro, gazing at the objects which presented themselves; and, involved in perplexity, I knocked with my heel louder than ever; but no less ineffectually.

Notwithstanding the lights which I had seen, it was possible that the house was uninhabited. This I was resolved to ascertain, by proceeding to the chamber which I had observed, from without, to be illuminated. This chamber, as far as the comparison of circumstances would permit me to decide, I believed to be the same in which I had passed the first night of my late abode in the city. Now was I, a second time, in almost equal ignorance of my situation, and of the consequences which impended, exploring my way to the same recess.

I mounted the stair. As I approached the door of which I was in search, a vapour, infectious and deadly, assailed my senses. It resembled nothing of which I had ever before been sensible. Many odours had been met with, even since my arrival in the city, less supportable than this. I seemed not so much to smell as to taste the element that now encompassed me. I felt as if I had inhaled a poisonous and subtle fluid, whose power instantly bereft my stomach of all vigour. Some fatal influence appeared to seize upon my vitals, and the work of corrosion and decomposition to be busily begun.

For a moment, I doubted whether imagination had not some share in producing my sensation; but I had not been previously panic-struck; and even now I attended to my own sensations without mental discomposure. That I had imbibed this disease was not to be questioned. So far the chances in my favour were annihilated. The lot of sickness was drawn.

Whether my case would be lenient or malignant, whether I should recover or perish, was to be left to the decision of the future. This incident, instead of appalling me, tended rather to invigorate my courage.

The danger which I feared had come. I might enter with indifference on this theatre of pestilence. I might execute, without faltering, the duties that my circumstances might create. My state was no longer hazardous; and my destiny would be totally uninfluenced by my future conduct.

The pang with which I was first seized, and the momentary inclination to vomit, which it produced, presently subsided. My wholesome feelings, indeed, did not revisit me, but strength to proceed was restored to me. The effluvia became more sensible as I approached the door of the chamber. The door was ajar; and the light within was perceived. My belief that those within were dead was presently confuted by sound, which I first supposed to be that of steps moving quickly and timorously across the floor. This ceased, and was succeeded by sounds of different but inexplicable import.

Having entered the apartment, I saw a candle on the hearth. A table was covered with vials and other apparatus of a sick-chamber. A bed stood on one side, the curtain of which was dropped at the foot, so as to conceal any one within. I fixed my eyes upon this object. There were sufficient tokens that some one lay upon the bed. Breath, drawn at long intervals; mutterings scarcely audible; and a tremulous motion in the bedstead, were fearful and intelligible indications.

If my heart faltered, it must not be supposed that my trepidations arose from any selfish considerations. Wallace only, the object of my search, was present to my fancy. Pervaded with remembrance of the Hadwins; of the agonies which they had already endured; of the despair which would overwhelm the unhappy Susan when the death of her lover should be ascertained; observant of the lonely condition of this house, whence I could only infer that the sick had been denied suitable attendance; and reminded, by the symptoms that appeared, that this being was struggling with the agonies of death; a sickness of the heart, more insupportable than that which I had just experienced, stole upon me.

My fancy readily depicted the progress and completion of this tragedy. Wallace was the first of the family on whom the pestilence had seized. Thetford had fled from his habitation. Perhaps as a father and husband, to shun the danger attending his stay was the injunction of his duty. It was questionless the conduct which selfish regards would dictate. Wallace was left to perish alone; or, perhaps, (which, indeed, was a supposition somewhat justified by appearances,) he had been left to the tendance of mercenary wretches; by whom, at this desperate moment, he had been abandoned.

I was not mindless of the possibility that these forebodings, specious as they were, might be false. The dying person might be some other than Wallace. The whispers of my hope were, indeed, faint; but they, at least, prompted me to snatch a look at the expiring man. For this purpose I advanced and thrust my head within the curtain.

#### *Chapter XVI.*

The features of one whom I had seen so transiently as Wallace may be imagined to be not easily recognised, especially when those features were tremulous and deathful. Here, however, the differences were too conspicuous to mislead me. I beheld one in whom I could recollect none that bore resemblance. Though ghastly and livid, the traces of intelligence and beauty were undefaced. The life of Wallace was of more value to a feeble individual; but surely the being that was stretched before me, and who was hastening to his last breath, was precious to thousands.

Was he not one in whose place I would willingly have died? The offering was too late. His extremities were already cold. A vapour, noisome and contagious, hovered over him. The flutterings of his pulse had ceased. His existence was about to close amidst convulsion and pangs.

I withdrew my gaze from this object, and walked to a table. I was nearly unconscious of my movements. My thoughts were occupied with contemplations of the train of horrors and disasters that pursue the race of man. My musings were quickly interrupted by the sight of a small cabinet, the hinges of which were broken and the lid half raised. In the present state of my thoughts, I was prone to suspect the worst. Here were traces of pillage. Some casual or mercenary attendant had not only contributed to hasten the death of the patient, but had rifled his property and fled.

This suspicion would, perhaps, have yielded to mature reflections, if I had been suffered to reflect. A moment scarcely elapsed, when some appearance in the mirror, which hung over the table, called my attention. It was a human figure. Nothing could be briefer than the glance that I fixed upon this apparition; yet there was room enough for the vague conception to suggest itself, that the dying man had started from his bed and was approaching me. This belief was, at the same instant, confuted, by the survey of his form and garb. One eye, a scar upon his cheek, a tawny skin, a form grotesquely misproportioned, brawny as Hercules, and habited in livery, composed, as it were, the parts of one view.

To perceive, to fear, and to confront this apparition were blended into one sentiment. I turned towards him with the swiftness of lightning; but my speed was useless to my safety. A blow upon my temple was succeeded by an utter oblivion of thought and of feeling. I sunk upon the floor prostrate and senseless.

My insensibility might be mistaken by observers for death, yet some part of this interval was haunted by a fearful dream. I conceived myself lying on the brink of a pit, whose bottom the eye could not reach. My hands and legs were fettered, so as to disable me from resisting two grim and gigantic figures who stooped to lift me from the earth. Their purpose, me thought, was to cast me into this abyss. My terrors were unspeakable, and I struggled with such force, that my bonds snapped and I found myself at liberty. At this moment my senses returned, and I opened my eyes.

The memory of recent events was, for a time, effaced by my visionary horrors. I was conscious of transition from one state of being to another; but my imagination was still filled with images of danger. The bottomless gulf and my gigantic persecutors were still dreaded. I looked up with eagerness. Beside me I discovered three figures, whose character or office was explained by a coffin of pine boards which lay upon the floor. One stood with hammer and nails in his hand, as ready to replace and fasten the lid of the coffin as soon as its burden should be received.

I attempted to rise from the floor, but my head was dizzy and my sight confused. Perceiving me revive, one of the men assisted me to regain my feet. The mist and confusion presently vanished, so as to allow me to stand unsupported and to move. I once more gazed at my attendants, and recognised the three men whom I had met in High Street, and whose conversation I have mentioned that I overheard. I looked again upon the coffin. A wavering recollection of the incidents that led me hither, and of the stunning blow which I had received, occurred to me. I saw into what error appearances had misled these men, and shuddered to reflect by what hairbreadth means I had escaped being buried alive.

Before the men had time to interrogate me, or to comment upon my situation, one entered the apartment, whose habit and mien tended to encourage me. The stranger was characterized by an aspect full of composure and benignity, a face in which the serious lines of age were blended with the ruddiness and smoothness of youth, and a garb that bespoke that religious profession with whose benevolent doctrines the example of Hadwin had rendered me familiar.

On observing me on my feet, he betrayed marks of surprise and satisfaction. He addressed me in a tone of mildness:--

“Young man,” said he, “what is thy condition? Art thou sick? If thou art, thou must consent to receive the best treatment which the times will afford. These men will convey thee to the hospital at Bush Hill.”

The mention of that contagious and abhorred receptacle inspired me with some degree of energy. “No,” said I, “I am not sick; a violent blow reduced me to this situation. I shall presently recover strength enough to leave this spot without assistance.”

He looked at me with an incredulous but compassionate air:-- “I fear thou dost deceive thyself or me. The necessity of going to the hospital is much to be regretted, but, on the whole, it is best. Perhaps, indeed, thou hast kindred or friends who will take care of thee?”

"No," said I; "neither kindred nor friends. I am a stranger in the city. I do not even know a single being."

"Alas!" returned the stranger, with a sigh, "thy state is sorrowful. But how camest thou hither?" continued he, looking around him; "and whence comest thou?"

"I came from the country. I reached the city a few hours ago. I was in search of a friend who lived in this house."

"Thy undertaking was strangely hazardous and rash; but who is the friend thou seekest? Was it he who died in that bed, and whose corpse has just been removed?"

The men now betrayed some impatience; and inquired of the last comer, whom they called Mr. Estwick, what they were to do. He turned to me, and asked if I were willing to be conducted to the hospital.

I assured him that I was free from disease, and stood in no need of assistance; adding, that my feebleness was owing to a stunning blow received from a ruffian on my temple. The marks of this blow were conspicuous, and after some hesitation he dismissed the men; who, lifting the empty coffin on their shoulders, disappeared.

He now invited me to descend into the parlour; "for," said he, "the air of this room is deadly. I feel already as if I should have reason to repent of having entered it."

He now inquired into the cause of those appearances which he had witnessed. I explained my situation as clearly and succinctly as I was able.

After pondering, in silence, on my story, -- "I see how it is," said he; "the person whom thou sawest in the agonies of death was a stranger. He was attended by his servant and a hired nurse. His master's death being certain, the nurse was despatched by the servant to procure a coffin. He probably chose that opportunity to rifle his master's trunk, that stood upon the table. Thy unseasonable entrance interrupted him; and he designed, by the blow which he gave thee, to secure his retreat before the arrival of a hearse. I know the man, and the apparition thou hast so well described was his. Thou sayest that a friend of thine lived in this house: thou hast come too late to be of service. The whole family have perished. Not one was suffered to escape."

This intelligence was fatal to my hopes. It required some efforts to subdue my rising emotions. Compassion not only for Wallace, but for Thetford, his father, his wife and his child, caused a passionate effusion of tears. I was ashamed of this useless and childlike sensibility; and attempted to apologize to my companion. The sympathy, however, had proved contagious, and the stranger turned away his face to hide his own tears.

"Nay," said he, in answer to my excuses, "there is no need to be ashamed of thy emotion. Merely to have known this family, and to have witnessed their deplorable fate, is sufficient to melt the most obdurate heart. I suspect that thou wast united to some one of this family by ties of tenderness like those which led the unfortunate *Maravegli* hither."

This suggestion was attended, in relation to myself, with some degree of obscurity; but my curiosity was somewhat excited by the name that he had mentioned, I inquired into the character and situation of this person, and particularly respecting his connection with this family.

"Maravegli," answered he, "was the lover of the eldest daughter, and already betrothed to her. The whole family, consisting of helpless females, had placed themselves under his peculiar guardianship. Mary Walpole and her children enjoyed in him a husband and a father."

The name of Walpole, to which I was a stranger, suggested doubts which I hastened to communicate. "I am in search," said I, "not of a female friend, though not devoid of interest in the welfare of Thetford and his family. My principal concern is for a youth, by name Wallace."

He looked at me with surprise. "Thetford! this is not his abode. He changed his habitation some weeks previous to the *fever*. Those who last dwelt under this roof were an Englishwoman and seven daughters."

This detection of my error somewhat consoled me. It was still possible that Wallace was alive and in safety. I eagerly inquired whither Thetford had removed, and whether he had any knowledge of his present condition.

They had removed to No.--, in Market Street. Concerning their state he knew nothing. His acquaintance with Thetford was imperfect. Whether he had left the city or had remained, he was wholly uninformed.

It became me to ascertain the truth in these respects. I was preparing to offer my parting thanks to the person by whom I had been so highly benefited; since, as he now informed me, it was by his interposition that I was hindered from being enclosed alive in a coffin. He was dubious of my true condition, and peremptorily commanded the followers of the hearse to desist. A delay of twenty minutes, and some medical application, would, he believed, determine whether my life was extinguished or suspended. At the end of this time, happily, my senses were recovered.

Seeing my intention to depart, he inquired why, and whither I was going. Having heard my answer,-- "Thy design," resumed he, "is highly indiscreet and rash. Nothing will sooner generate this fever than fatigue and anxiety. Thou hast scarcely recovered from the blow so lately received. Instead of being useful to others, this precipitation will only disable thyself. Instead of roaming the streets and inhaling this unwholesome air, thou hadst better betake thyself to bed and try to obtain some sleep. In the morning, thou wilt be better qualified to ascertain the fate of thy friend, and afford him the relief which he shall want."

I could not but admit the reasonableness of these remonstrances; but where should a chamber and bed be sought? It was not likely that a new attempt to procure accommodation at the inns would succeed better than the former.

"Thy state," replied he, "is sorrowful. I have no house to which I can lead thee. I divide my chamber, and even my bed, with another, and my landlady could not be prevailed upon to admit a stranger. What thou wilt do, I know not. This house has no one to defend it. It was purchased and furnished by the last possessor; but the whole family, including mistress, children, and servants, were cut off in a single week. Perhaps no one in America can claim the property. Meanwhile, plunderers are numerous and active. A house thus totally deserted, and replenished with valuable furniture, will, I fear, become their prey. Tonight nothing can be done towards rendering it secure, but staying in it. Art thou willing to remain here till the morrow?

"Every bed in the house has probably sustained a dead person. It would not be proper, therefore, to lie in any one of them. Perhaps thou mayest find some repose upon this carpet. It is, at least, better than the harder pavement and the open air."

This proposal, after some hesitation, I embraced. He was preparing to leave me, promising, if life were spared to him, to return early in the morning. My curiosity respecting the person whose dying agonies I had witnessed prompted me to detain him a few minutes.

"Ah!" said he, "this, perhaps, is the only one of many victims to this pestilence whose loss the remotest generations may have reason to deplore. He was the only descendant of an illustrious house of Venice. He has been devoted from his childhood to the acquisition of knowledge and the practice of virtue. He came hither as an enlightened observer; and, after traversing the country, conversing with all the men in

it eminent for their talents or their office, and collecting a fund of observations whose solidity and justice have seldom been paralleled, he embarked, three months ago, for Europe.

“Previously to his departure, he formed a tender connection with the eldest daughter of this family. The mother and her children had recently arrived from England. So many faultless women, both mentally and personally considered, it was not my fortune to meet with before. This youth well deserved to be adopted into this family. He proposed to return with the utmost expedition to his native country, and, after the settlement of his affairs, to hasten back to America and ratify his contract with Fanny Walpole.

“The ship in which he embarked had scarcely gone twenty leagues to sea, before she was disabled by a storm, and obliged to return to port. He posted to New York, to gain a passage in a packet shortly to sail. Meanwhile this malady prevailed among us. Mary Walpole pole was hindered by her ignorance of the nature of that evil which assailed us, and the counsel of injudicious friends, from taking the due precautions for her safety. She hesitated to fly till flight was rendered impracticable. Her death added to the helplessness and distraction of the family. They were successively seized and destroyed by the same pest.

“Maravegli was apprized of their danger. He allowed the packet to depart without him, and hastened to rescue the Walpoles from the perils which encompassed them. He arrived in this city time enough to witness the interment of the last survivor. In the same hour he was seized himself by this disease: the catastrophe is known to thee.

“I will now leave thee to thy repose. Sleep is no less needful to myself than to thee; for this is the second night which has passed without it.” Saying this, my companion took his leave.

I now enjoyed leisure to review my situation. I experienced no inclination to sleep. I lay down for a moment, but my comfortless sensations and restless contemplations would not permit me to rest. Before I entered this house, I was tormented with hunger; but my craving had given place to inquietude and loathing. I paced, in thoughtful and anxious mood, across the floor of the apartment.

I mused upon the incidents related by Estwick, upon the exterminating nature of this pestilence, and on the horrors of which it was productive. I compared the experience of the last hours with those pictures which my imagination had drawn in the retirements of *Malverton*. I wondered at the contrariety that exists between the scenes of the city and the country; and fostered, with more zeal than ever, the resolution to avoid those seats of depravity and danger.

Concerning my own destiny, however, I entertained no doubt. My new sensations assured me that my stomach had received this corrosive poison. Whether I should die or live was easily decided. The sickness which assiduous attendance and powerful prescriptions might remove would, by negligence and solitude, be rendered fatal; but from whom could I expect medical or friendly treatment?

I had indeed a roof over my head. I should not perish in the public way; but what was my ground for hoping to continue under this roof? My sickness being suspected, I should be dragged in a cart to the hospital; where I should, indeed, die, but not with the consolation of loneliness and silence. Dying groans were the only music, and livid corpses were the only spectacle, to which I should there be introduced.

Immured in these dreary meditations, the night passed away. The light glancing through the window awakened in my bosom a gleam of cheerfulness. Contrary to my expectations, my feelings were not more distempered, notwithstanding my want of sleep, than on the last evening. This was a token that my state was far from being so desperate as I suspected. It was possible, I thought, that this was the worst indisposition to which I was liable.

Meanwhile, the coming of Estwick was impatiently expected. The sun arose, and the morning advanced, but he came not. I remembered that he talked of having reason to repent his visit to this house. Perhaps he, likewise, was sick, and this was the cause of his delay. This man’s kindness had even my love. If I had known the way to his dwelling, I should have hastened thither, to inquire into his condition, and to

perform for him every office that humanity might enjoin; but he had not afforded me any information on that head.

### *Chapter XVII.*

It was now incumbent on me to seek the habitation of Thetford. To leave this house accessible to every passenger appeared to be imprudent. I had no key by which I might lock the principal door. I therefore bolted it on the inside, and passed through a window, the shutters of which I closed, though I could not fasten after me. This led me into a spacious court, at the end of which was a brick wall, over which I leaped into the street. This was the means by which I had formerly escaped from the same precincts.

The streets, as I passed, were desolate and silent. The largest computation made the number of fugitives two-thirds of the whole people; yet, judging by the universal desolation, it seemed as if the solitude were nearly absolute. That so many of the houses were closed, I was obliged to ascribe to the cessation of traffic, which made the opening of their windows useless, and the terror of infection, which made the inhabitants seclude themselves from the observation of each other.

I proceeded to search out the house to which Estwick had directed me as the abode of Thetford. What was my consternation when I found it to be the same at the door of which the conversation took place of which I had been an auditor on the last evening!

I recalled the scene of which a rude sketch had been given by the *hearse-men*. If such were the fate of the master of the family, abounding with money and friends, what could be hoped for the moneyless and friendless Wallace? The house appeared to be vacant and silent; but these tokens might deceive. There was little room for hope; but certainty was wanting, and might, perhaps, be obtained by entering the house. In some of the upper rooms a wretched being might be immured; by whom the information, so earnestly desired, might be imparted, and to whom my presence might bring relief, not only from pestilence, but famine. For a moment, I forgot my own necessitous condition, and reflected not that abstinence had already undermined my strength.

I proceeded to knock at the door. That my signal was unnoticed produced no surprise. The door was unlocked, and I opened. At this moment my attention was attracted by the opening of another door near me. I looked, and perceived a man issuing forth from a house at a small distance.

It now occurred to me, that the information which I sought might possibly be gained from one of Thetford's neighbours. This person was aged, but seemed to have lost neither cheerfulness nor vigour. He had an air of intrepidity and calmness. It soon appeared that I was the object of his curiosity. He had, probably, marked my deportment through some window of his dwelling, and had come forth to make inquiries into the motives of my conduct.

He courteously saluted me. "You seem," said he, "to be in search of some one. If I can afford you the information you want, you will be welcome to it."

Encouraged by this address, I mentioned the name of Thetford; and added my fears that he had not escaped the general calamity.

"It is true," said he. "Yesterday himself, his wife, and his child, were in a hopeless condition. I saw them in the evening, and expected not to find them alive this morning. As soon as it was light, however, I visited the house again; but found it empty. I suppose they must have died, and been removed in the night."

Though anxious to ascertain the destiny of Wallace, I was unwilling to put direct questions. I shuddered, while I longed to know the truth.

"Why," said I, falteringly, "did he not seasonably withdraw from the city? Surely he had the means of purchasing an asylum in the country."

"I can scarcely tell you," he answered. "Some infatuation appeared to have seized him. No one was more timorous; but he seemed to think himself safe as long as he avoided contact with infected persons. He was likewise, I believe, detained by a regard to his interest. His flight would not have been more injurious to his affairs than it was to those of others; but gain was, in his eyes, the supreme good. He intended ultimately to withdraw; but his escape to-day, gave him new courage to encounter the perils of to-morrow. He deferred his departure from day to day, till it ceased to be practicable."

"His family," said I, "was numerous. It consisted of more than his wife and children. Perhaps these retired in sufficient season."

"Yes," said he; "his father left the house at an early period. One or two of the servants likewise forsook him. One girl, more faithful and heroic than the rest, resisted the remonstrances of her parents and friends, and resolved to adhere to him in every fortune. She was anxious that the family should fly from danger, and would willingly have fled in their company; but while they stayed, it was her immovable resolution not to abandon them.

"Alas, poor girl! She knew not of what stuff the heart of Thetford was made. Unhappily, she was the first to become sick. I question much whether her disease was pestilential. It was, probably, a slight indisposition, which, in a few days, would have vanished of itself, or have readily yielded to suitable treatment.

"Thetford was transfixed with terror. Instead of summoning a physician, to ascertain the nature of her symptoms, he called a negro and his cart from Bush Hill. In vain the neighbours interceded for this unhappy victim. In vain she implored his clemency, and asserted the lightness of her indisposition. She besought him to allow her to send to her mother, who resided a few miles in the country, who would hasten to her succour, and relieve him and his family from the danger and trouble of nursing her.

"The man was lunatic with apprehension. He rejected her entreaties, though urged in a manner that would have subdued a heart of flint. The girl was innocent, and amiable, and courageous, but entertained an unconquerable dread of the hospital. Finding entreaties ineffectual, she exerted all her strength in opposition to the man who lifted her into the cart.

"Finding that her struggles availed nothing, she resigned herself to despair. In going to the hospital, she believed herself led to certain death, and to the sufferance of every evil which the known inhumanity of its attendants could inflict. This state of mind, added to exposure to a noonday sun, in an open vehicle, moving, for a mile, over a rugged pavement, was sufficient to destroy her. I was not surprised to hear that she died the next day.

"This proceeding was sufficiently iniquitous; yet it was not the worst act of this man. The rank and education of the young woman might be some apology for negligence; but his clerk, a youth who seemed to enjoy his confidence, and to be treated by his family on the footing of a brother or son, fell sick on the next night, and was treated in the same manner."

These tidings struck me to the heart. A burst of indignation and sorrow filled my eyes. I could scarcely stifle my emotions sufficiently to ask, "Of whom, sir, do you speak? Was the name of the youth -- his name -- was --"

"His name was Wallace. I see that you have some interest in his fate. He was one whom I loved. I would have given half my fortune to procure him accommodation under some hospitable roof. His attack was violent; but, still, his recovery, if he had been suitably attended, was possible. That he should survive removal to the hospital, and the treatment he must receive when there, was not to be hoped.

The conduct of Thetford was as absurd as it was wicked. To imagine the disease to be contagious was the height of folly; to suppose himself secure, merely by not permitting a sick man to remain under his roof, was no less stupid; but Thetford's fears had subverted his understanding. He did not listen to arguments or supplications. His attention was incapable of straying from one object. To influence him by words was equivalent to reasoning with the deaf.

"Perhaps the wretch was more to be pitied than hated. The victims of his implacable caution could scarcely have endured agonies greater than those which his pusillanimity inflicted on himself. Whatever be the amount of his guilt, the retribution has been adequate. He witnessed the death of his wife and child, and last night was the close of his own existence. Their sole attendant was a black woman; whom, by frequent visits, I endeavoured, with little success, to make diligent in the performance of her duty."

Such, then, was the catastrophe of Wallace. The end for which I journeyed hither was accomplished. His destiny was ascertained; and all that remained was to fulfill the gloomy predictions of the lovely but unhappy Susan. To tell them all the truth would be needlessly to exasperate her sorrow. Time, aided by the tenderness and sympathy of friendship, may banish her despair, and relieve her from all but the witcheries of melancholy.

Having disengaged my mind from these reflections, I explained to my companion, in general terms, my reasons for visiting the city, and my curiosity respecting Thetford. He inquired into the particulars of my journey, and the time of my arrival. When informed that I had come in the preceding evening, and had passed the subsequent hours without sleep or food, he expressed astonishment and compassion.

"Your undertaking," said he, "has certainly been hazardous. There is poison in every breath which you draw, but this hazard has been greatly increased by abstaining from food and sleep. My advice is to hasten back into the country; but you must first take some repose and some victuals. If you pass Schuylkill before nightfall, it will be sufficient."

I mentioned the difficulty of procuring accommodation on the road. It would be most prudent to set out upon my journey so as to reach *Malverton* at night. As to food and sleep, they were not to be purchased in this city.

"True," answered my companion, with quickness, "they are not to be bought; but I will furnish you with as much as you desire of both, for nothing. That is my abode," continued he, pointing to the house which he had lately left. "I reside with a widow lady and her daughter, who took my counsel, and fled in due season. I remain to moralize upon the scene, with only a faithful black, who makes my bed, prepares my coffee, and bakes my loaf. If I am sick, all that a physician can do, I will do for myself, and all that a nurse can perform, I expect to be performed by *Austin*.

"Come with me, drink some coffee, rest a while on my mattress, and then fly, with my benedictions on your head."

These words were accompanied by features disengaged and benevolent. My temper is alive to social impulses, and I accepted his invitation, not so much because I wished to eat or to sleep, but because I felt reluctance to part so soon with a being who possessed so much fortitude and virtue.

He was surrounded by neatness and plenty. Austin added dexterity to submissiveness. My companion, whose name I now found to be Medlicote, was prone to converse, and commented on the state of the city like one whose reading had been extensive and experience large. He combated an opinion which I had casually formed respecting the origin of this epidemic, and imputed it, not to infected substances imported from the East or West, but to a morbid constitution of the atmosphere, owing wholly or in part to filthy streets, airless habitations, and squalid persons.

As I talked with this man, the sense of danger was obliterated, I felt confidence revive in my heart, and energy revisit my stomach. Though far from my wonted health, my sensation grew less comfortless, and I found myself to stand in no need of repose.

Breakfast being finished, my friend pleaded his daily engagements as reasons for leaving me. He counselled me to strive for some repose, but I was conscious of incapacity to sleep. I was desirous of escaping, as soon as possible, from this tainted atmosphere, and reflected whether any thing remained to be done respecting Wallace.

It now occurred to me that this youth must have left some clothes and papers, and, perhaps, books. The property of these was now vested in the Hadwins. I might deem myself, without presumption, their representative or agent. Might I not take some measures for obtaining possession, or at least for the security, of these articles?

The house and its furniture were tenantless and unprotected. It was liable to be ransacked and pillaged by those desperate ruffians of whom many were said to be hunting for spoil even at a time like this. If these should overlook this dwelling, Thetford's unknown successor or heir might appropriate the whole. Numberless accidents might happen to occasion the destruction or embezzlement of what belonged to Wallace, which might be prevented by the conduct which I should now pursue...

#### *Chapter XVIII.*

I wandered over this deserted mansion, in a considerable degree, at random. Effluvia of a pestilential nature assailed me from every corner. In the front room of the second story, I imagined that I discovered vestiges of that catastrophe which the past night had produced. The bed appeared as if some one had recently been dragged from it. The sheets were tinged with yellow, and with that substance which is said to be characteristic of this disease, the gangrenous or black vomit. The floor exhibited similar stains.

There are many who will regard my conduct as the last refinement of temerity, or of heroism. Nothing, indeed, more perplexes me than a review of my own conduct. Not, indeed, that death is an object always to be dreaded, or that my motive did not justify my actions; but of all dangers, those allied to pestilence, by being mysterious and unseen, are the most formidable. To disarm them of their terrors requires the longest familiarity. Nurses and physicians soonest become intrepid or indifferent; but the rest of mankind recoil from the scene with unconquerable loathing.

I was sustained, not by confidence of safety, and a belief of exemption from this malady, or by the influence of habit, which inures us to all that is detestable or perilous, but by a belief that this was as eligible an avenue to death as any other; and that life is a trivial sacrifice in the cause of duty.

I passed from one room to the other. A portmanteau, marked with the initials of Wallace's name, at length attracted my notice. From this circumstance I inferred that this apartment had been occupied by him. The room was neatly arranged, and appeared as if no one had lately used it. There were trunks and drawers. That which I have mentioned was the only one that bore marks of Wallace's ownership. This I lifted in my arms with a view to remove it to Medlicote's house.

At that moment, methought I heard a footstep slowly and lingeringly ascending the stair. I was disconcerted at this incident. The footstep had in it a ghost-like solemnity and tardiness. This phantom vanished in a moment, and yielded place to more humble conjectures. A human being approached, whose office and commission were inscrutable. That we were strangers to each other was easily imagined; but how would my appearance, in this remote chamber, and loaded with another's property, be interpreted? Did he enter the house after me, or was he the tenant of some chamber hitherto unvisited; whom my entrance had awakened from his trance and called from his couch?

In the confusion of my mind, I still held my burden uplifted. To have placed it on the floor, and encountered this visitant, without this equivocal token about me, was the obvious proceeding. Indeed, time only could decide whether these footsteps tended to this, or to some other, apartment.

My doubts were quickly dispelled. The door opened, and a figure glided in. The portmanteau dropped from my arms, and my heart's blood was chilled. If an apparition of the dead were possible, (and that possibility I could not deny,) this was such an apparition. A hue, yellowish and livid; bones, uncovered with flesh; eyes, ghastly, hollow, woe-begone, and fixed in an agony of wonder upon me; and locks, matted and negligent, constituted the image which I now beheld. My belief of somewhat preternatural in this appearance was confirmed by recollection of resemblances between these features and those of one who was dead. In this shape and visage, shadowy and death-like as they were, the lineaments of Wallace, of him who had misled my rustic simplicity on my first visit to this city, and whose death I had conceived to be incontestably ascertained, were forcibly recognised.

This recognition, which at first alarmed my superstition, speedily led to more rational inferences. Wallace had been dragged to the hospital. Nothing was less to be suspected than that he would return alive from that hideous receptacle, but this was by no means impossible. The figure that stood before me had just risen from the bed of sickness, and from the brink of the grave. The crisis of his malady had passed, and he was once more entitled to be ranked among the living.

This event, and the consequences which my imagination connected with it, filled me with the liveliest joy. I thought not of his ignorance of the causes of my satisfaction, of the doubts to which the circumstances of our interview would give birth, respecting the integrity of my purpose. I forgot the artifices by which I had formerly been betrayed, and the embarrassments which a meeting with the victim of his artifices would excite in him; I thought only of the happiness which his recovery would confer upon his uncle and his cousins.

I advanced towards him with an air of congratulation, and offered him my hand. He shrunk back, and exclaimed, in a feeble voice, "Who are you? What business have you here?"

"I am the friend of Wallace, if he will allow me to be so. I am a messenger from your uncle and cousins at *Malverton*. I came to know the cause of your silence, and to afford you any assistance in my power."

He continued to regard me with an air of suspicion and doubt. These I endeavoured to remove by explaining the motives that led me hither. It was with difficulty that he seemed to credit my representations. When thoroughly convinced of the truth of my assertions, he inquired with great anxiety and tenderness concerning his relations; and expressed his hope that they were ignorant of what had befallen him.

I could not encourage his hopes. I regretted my own precipitation in adopting the belief of his death. This belief had been uttered with confidence, and without stating my reasons for embracing it, to Mr. Hadwin. These tidings would be borne to his daughters, and their grief would be exasperated to a deplorable and perhaps to a fatal degree.

There was but one method of repairing or eluding this mischief. Intelligence ought to be conveyed to them of his recovery. But where was the messenger to be found? No one's attention could be found disengaged from his own concerns. Those who were able or willing to leave the city had sufficient motives for departure, in relation to themselves. If vehicle or horse were procurable for money, ought it not to be secured for the use of Wallace himself, whose health required the easiest and speediest conveyance from this theatre of death?

My companion was powerless in mind as in limbs. He seemed unable to consult upon the means of escaping from the inconveniences by which he was surrounded. As soon as sufficient strength was regained, he had left the hospital. To repair to *Malverton* was the measure which prudence obviously dictated; but he was hopeless of effecting it. The city was close at hand; this was his usual home; and hither his tottering and almost involuntary steps conducted him.

He listened to my representations and counsels, and acknowledged their propriety. He put himself under my protection and guidance, and promised to conform implicitly to my directions. His strength had

sufficed to bring him thus far, but was now utterly exhausted. The task of searching for a carriage and horse devolved upon me.

In effecting this purpose, I was obliged to rely upon my own ingenuity and diligence. Wallace, though so long a resident in the city, knew not to whom I could apply, or by whom carriages were let to hire. My own reflections taught me, that this accommodation was most likely to be furnished by innkeepers, or that some of those might at least inform me of the best measures to be taken. I resolved to set out immediately on this search. Meanwhile, Wallace was persuaded to take refuge in Medlicote's apartments; and to make, by the assistance of Austin, the necessary preparation for his journey.

The morning had now advanced. The rays of a sultry sun had a sickening and enfeebling influence beyond any which I had ever experienced. The drought of unusual duration had bereft the air and the earth of every particle of moisture. The element which I breathed appeared to have stagnated into noxiousness and putrefaction. I was astonished at observing the enormous diminution of my strength. My brows were heavy, my intellects benumbed, my sinews enfeebled, and my sensations universally unquiet...

I went from one tavern to another. One was deserted; in another the people were sick, and their attendants refused to hearken to my inquiries or offers; at a third, their horses were engaged. I was determined to prosecute my search as long as an inn or a livery-stable remained unexamined, and my strength would permit.

To detail the events of this expedition, the arguments and supplications which I used to overcome the dictates of avarice and fear, the fluctuation of my hopes and my incessant disappointments, would be useless. Having exhausted all my expedients ineffectually, I was compelled to turn my weary steps once more to Medlicote's lodgings...

On entering Medlicote's house, my looks, which, in spite of my languors, were sprightly and confident, flattered Wallace with the belief that my exertions had succeeded. When acquainted with their failure, he sunk as quickly into hopelessness. My new expedient was heard by him with no marks of satisfaction. It was impossible, he said, to move from this spot by his own strength. All his powers were exhausted by his walk from Bush Hill...

This interval allowed him to reflect upon the past, and to inquire into the fate of Thetford and his family. The intelligence which Medlicote had enabled me to afford him was heard with more satisfaction than regret. The ingratitude and cruelty with which he had been treated seemed to have extinguished every sentiment but hatred and vengeance. I was willing to profit by this interval to know more of Thetford than I already possessed. I inquired why Wallace had so perversely neglected the advice of his uncle and cousin, and persisted to brave so many dangers when flight was so easy.

"I cannot justify my conduct," answered he. "It was in the highest degree thoughtless and perverse. I was confident and unconcerned as long as our neighbourhood was free from disease, and as long as I forbore any communication with the sick; yet I should have withdrawn to Malverton, merely to gratify my friends, if Thetford had not used the most powerful arguments to detain me. He laboured to extenuate the danger.

"Why not stay," said he, "as long as I and my family stay? Do you think that we would linger here, if the danger were imminent? As soon as it becomes so, we will fly. You know that we have a country-house prepared for our reception. When we go, you shall accompany us. Your services at this time are indispensable to my affairs. If you will not desert me, your salary next year shall be double; and that will enable you to marry your cousin immediately. Nothing is more improbable than that any of us should be sick; but, if this should happen to you, I plight my honour that you shall be carefully and faithfully attended.

"These assurances were solemn and generous. To make Susan Hadwin my wife was the scope of all my wishes and labours. By staying, I should hasten this desirable event, and incur little hazard. By going, I should alienate the affections of Thetford; by whom, it is but justice to acknowledge, that I had

hitherto been treated with unexampled generosity and kindness; and blast all the schemes I had formed for rising into wealth.

“My resolution was by no means steadfast. As often as a letter from *Malverton* arrived, I felt myself disposed to hasten away; but this inclination was combated by new arguments and new entreaties of Thetford.

“In this state of suspense, the girl by whom Mrs. Thetford’s infant was nursed fell sick. She was an excellent creature, and merited better treatment than she received. Like me, she resisted the persuasions of her friends, but her motives for remaining were disinterested and heroic.

“No sooner did her indisposition appear, than she was hurried to the hospital. I saw that no reliance could be placed upon the assurances of Thetford. Every consideration gave way to his fear of death. After the girl’s departure, though he knew that she was led by his means to execution, yet he consoled himself by repeating and believing her assertions, that her disease was not *the fever*.

“I was now greatly alarmed for my own safety. I was determined to encounter his anger and repel his persuasions; and to depart with the market-man next morning. That night, however, I was seized with a violent fever. I knew in what manner patients were treated at the hospital, and removal thither was to the last degree abhorred.

“The morning arrived, and my situation was discovered. At the first intimation, Thetford rushed out of the house, and refused to re-enter it till I was removed. I knew not my fate, till three ruffians made their appearance at my bedside, and communicated their commission.

“I called on the name of Thetford and his wife. I entreated a moment’s delay, till I had seen these persons, and endeavoured to procure a respite from my sentence. They were deaf to my entreaties, and prepared to execute their office by force. I was delirious with rage and terror. I heaped the bitterest execrations on my murderer; and by turns, invoked the compassion of, and poured a torrent of reproaches on, the wretches whom he had selected for his ministers. My struggles and outcries were vain.

“I have no perfect recollection of what passed till my arrival at the hospital. My passions combined with my disease to make me frantic and wild. In a state like mine, the slightest motion could not be endured without agony. What then must I have felt, scorched and dazzled by the sun, sustained by hard boards, and borne for miles over a rugged pavement?

“I cannot make you comprehend the anguish of my feelings. To be disjointed and torn piecemeal by the rack was a torment inexpressibly inferior to this. Nothing excites my wonder but that I did not expire before the cart had moved three paces.

“I knew not how, or by whom, I was moved from this vehicle. Insensibility came at length to my relief. After a time I opened my eyes, and slowly gained some knowledge of my situation. I lay upon a mattress, whose condition proved that a half-decayed corpse had recently been dragged from it. The room was large, but it was covered with beds like my own. Between each, there was scarcely the interval of three feet. Each sustained a wretch, whose groans and distortions bespoke the desperateness of his condition.

“The atmosphere was loaded by mortal stenches. A vapour, suffocating and malignant, scarcely allowed me to breathe. No suitable receptacle was provided for the evacuations produced by medicine or disease. My nearest neighbour was struggling with death, and my bed, casually extended, was moist with the detestable matter which had flowed from his stomach.

“You will scarcely believe that, in this scene of horrors, the sound of laughter should be overheard. While the upper rooms of this building are filled with the sick and the dying, the lower apartments are the scene of carousals and mirth. The wretches who are hired, at enormous wages, to tend the sick and convey away the dead, neglect their duty, and consume the cordials which are provided for the patients, in debauchery and riot.

“A female visage, bloated with malignity and drunkenness, occasionally looked in. Dying eyes were cast upon her, invoking the boon, perhaps, of a drop of cold water, or her assistance to change a posture which compelled him to behold the ghastly writhings or deathful *smile* of his neighbour.

“The visitant had left the banquet for a moment, only to see who was dead. If she entered the room, blinking eyes and reeling steps showed her to be totally unqualified for ministering the aid that was needed. Presently she disappeared, and others ascended the staircase, a coffin was deposited at the door, the wretch, whose heart still quivered, was seized by rude hands, and dragged along the floor into the passage.

“Oh! how poor are the conceptions which are formed, by the fortunate few, of the sufferings to which millions of their fellow-beings are condemned. This misery was more frightful, because it was seen to flow from the depravity of the attendants. My own eyes only would make me credit the existence of wickedness so enormous. No wonder that to die in garrets, and cellars, and stables, unvisited and unknown, had, by so many, been preferred to being brought hither.

“A physician cast an eye upon my state. He gave some directions to the person who attended him. I did not comprehend them, they were never executed by the nurses, and, if the attempt had been made, I should probably have refused to receive what was offered. Recovery was equally beyond my expectations and my wishes. The scene which was hourly displayed before me, the entrance of the sick, most of whom perished in a few hours, and their departure to the graves prepared for them, reminded me of the fate to which I, also, was reserved.

“Three days passed away, in which every hour was expected to be the last. That, amidst an atmosphere so contagious and deadly, amidst causes of destruction hourly accumulating, I should yet survive, appears to me nothing less than miraculous. That of so many conducted to this house the only one who passed out of it alive should be myself almost surpasses my belief.

“Some inexplicable principle rendered harmless those potent enemies of human life. My fever subsided and vanished. My strength was revived, and the first use that I made of my limbs was to bear me far from the contemplation and sufferance of those evils.”

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